

Violence Against Women

Women of all ages and backgrounds are at risk of many different types of violence. In fact, millions of women in this country have experienced violence. Violence greatly affects the lives and health of women: the impact can last for years—even a lifetime. But there are places to turn for help, ways to protect yourself, and hope for healing and a better future.

Women at risk

Women and girls of all ages, races, cultures, religions, education levels, and sexual orientations can experience violence. Based on reported cases, U.S. women most at risk of violence are:

- American Indians/Alaskan Natives
- African Americans
- Hispanics
- girls younger than 18
- women and girls living in poverty

The impact of violence

Experiencing violence can greatly impact how you feel about yourself, relationships, and the world around you. It can affect your physical and mental health. And it can change your behavior and daily life.

No one has the right to hurt you or make you feel afraid. Do not let feelings of fear, shame, or guilt stop you from seek-



ing help. You are not at fault, and you do not need to hide what has happened. Many people and groups are willing to help you.

Forms of Violence

Many terms are used to describe violence against women:

- Intimate partner violence
- Domestic violence
- Spouse or partner abuse
- Wife beating
- Rape, marital rape, date rape
- Family violence
- Sexual abuse, sexual violence, sexual assault
- Molestation
- Beating, battering
- Homicide, femicide
- Dating violence, dating abuse, teen dating violence
- Indecent exposure
- Voyeurism
- Stalking
- Harassment
- Human trafficking
- Genital mutilation
- Exploitation
- Forced prostitution
- Forced pornography

Effects of Violence on Women

Mental health

Women hurt by violence may have:

- Depression
- Low self-esteem, loss of confidence
- Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Guilt or shame
- Shock and disbelief
- Anxiety and panic attacks
- Emotional numbness
- Anger
- Self-hate or self-blame
- General sense of fear
- Fear of men, being alone, going out in public, intimacy, or anything that may trigger memories of the violence
- Suicidal thoughts
- Sense of being worthless or without hope

Effects of Violence on Women

Behavior	<p>Common actions after experiencing violence are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoughts or acts of suicide or self-injury • Risky sexual behaviors, such as unprotected sex • Alcohol or drug abuse • Eating disorders • Avoiding doctor visits or making unnecessary doctor visits
Physical health	<p>Common physical injuries and health problems from violence include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV, which can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease and a higher risk of cervical cancer • Unwanted pregnancies, or rapid, repeat pregnancies • Miscarriages and other reproductive problems • Vaginal bleeding or pelvic pain • Injuries such as bruises, cuts, broken bones, or internal damage • Back or neck pain • Chronic pain syndrome • Trouble sleeping and nightmares • High blood pressure or chest pain • Arthritis • High stress and lowered immune system • Central nervous system problems, such as headaches, seizures, or nerve damage • Respiratory problems, such as asthma and shortness of breath • Digestive problems, such as stomach ulcers and nausea
Economic	<p>Common financial struggles due to violence are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of income from missed work or a partner who withholds money • Medical bills • Legal fees • Rent or moving costs of new housing • Extra child care and protection costs
Social	<p>Common social issues due to violence include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stigma and discrimination • Trouble getting medical, social, and legal services • Strained relationships with friends and family • Social isolation (from family, friends, and others who could help)



Impact on children

Violence against women can also impact children. About 50 percent of men who assault their wives also physically abuse their children. Also, women who are abused are more likely to abuse their children. And children can be injured during violence between their parents.

Studies show children who witness or experience violence at home may have long-term physical, emotional, and social problems. They are also more likely to experience or commit violence in the future. Protect your children by getting help for yourself.

Common forms of violence

Although women often fear being attacked or hurt by a stranger, they are at greatest risk of violence from people they know:

- About 25 to 30 percent of women are physically or sexually abused by a romantic partner.
- One in 6 women reports being raped or sexually assaulted in her lifetime. And nearly 70 percent are attacked

by someone they know. (Research has shown that most women do not report their rapes to police, so the actual number of women raped may be much higher.)

- Around 1 million women are stalked each year, most often by someone they know, such as an ex-husband, ex-boyfriend, or peer.

This chapter focuses on three types of common violence against women:

- intimate partner violence
- sexual violence
- stalking

Intimate partner violence (IPV)

IPV can be a one-time event or a pattern of physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse. It happens in both heterosexual and same-sex couples. And it can happen in nonsexual relationships. Teen dating violence has many of the same risk factors, warning signs, and effects as IPV.



Forms of IPV	
Physical violence or threats	Your partner may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hurt or threaten you, possibly with a weapon • Become violent after alcohol or drug use • Destroy your things
Sexual abuse or threats	Your partner may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Force you to have sex or be sexual in other ways • Threaten to rape or hurt you sexually
Psychological/emotional abuse	IPV often starts with emotional abuse, then leads to physical violence. Your partner may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control who you spend time with, where you go, and what you do • Trace your phone calls • Insult you and get angry about small things • Accuse you of cheating • Make fun of you • Control how you spend your money or refuse to give you money • Act jealous when you spend time with friends • Blame you for his or her violence • Use your children to manipulate you • Follow you when you go out • Try to make you afraid

IPV is never okay, even if it only happens once in a while. It can be hard to admit you are in an abusive relationship or find a way out. But if your partner is hurting you, it is time to get help.

Many abused women stay with their partner out of fear or because they do not see a way out. Others stay because they love their partner and believe he or she will change. But the longer the abuse goes on, the more damage it can cause. Whether you decide to leave your partner or stay, make a safety plan in case IPV happens again. (See page 241 for “Planning Ahead.”)

If you leave, plan ahead for legal, medical, and emotional support, because IPV can escalate even after leaving a partner.



You may even need help from police and women’s shelters. They can help you find ways to protect yourself and your children.

- If you are in immediate danger, call 911.
- For 24-hour help and support, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline toll-free number listed in the resource section on page 249.

Preventing IPV

Help prevent IPV in your own life by seeking and building healthy relationships. Below are some signs of healthy and unhealthy relationships.

IPV and Pregnancy

IPV can affect the health of the mother and unborn baby. Abuse from a partner may begin, or increase, during pregnancy and can lead to:

- low-birth-weight babies and other health risks
- death of unborn and newborn babies
- homicide, which is the second leading cause of traumatic death for pregnant women and mothers with newborns

Signs of a healthy relationship	Signs of an unhealthy relationship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect for each other • Honesty • Trust and support • Able to compromise • Shared decision making • You are able to be yourself • Time spent together and apart • Good communication • Peaceful solutions to conflict • Anger control • Self-confidence and happiness • Feeling safe with partner, even when he or she is upset 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disrespect • Blaming and lying • Mistrust and jealousy • Put-downs, insults, name calling • One partner controls decision making • “Need” to be with partner; cannot be without the other • Fear of partner’s temper or actions • Partner pressures or forces other to be sexual • Fights get out of control • Feeling worthless or bad about yourself • Feeling unsafe with your partner

Early warning signs of IPV

If your partner displays one or more of the early signs below, get help early to prevent future IPV. If you start dating someone who displays warning signs, think twice about getting involved.

Does your partner or person you date:

- Get jealous when you spend time with other people?
- Act possessive?

- Have low self-esteem?
- Act aggressive?
- Create conflict, use put-downs, or argue a lot?
- Mistreat animals?
- Abuse drugs or alcohol?
- Have poor relationships with others?
- React badly to stress?
- Have extreme emotional highs and lows?

- Have a quick temper and lots of anger?
- Punch walls or throw things when angry?
- Need to be in control of the relationship?
- Have a history of bad relationships?
- abusing drugs or alcohol
- thinking violence in a relationship is all right
- strict beliefs about traditional gender roles
- having a lot of anger or hostility
- a history of partner abuse
- depression
- career or life stress, such as not having a job
- having been a victim of, or exposed to, violence as a child

Highest risks of IPV

You cannot always predict whether your partner will become violent. But studies show some traits increase the risk of someone becoming violent with their partner. These traits include:

Planning Ahead

If you are being abused, create a safety plan. Contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline for help.

A few ways to prepare are to:

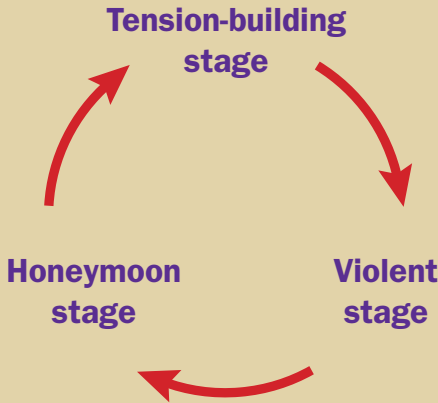
- Plan all possible escape routes from your home.
- Know your partner’s “red flags”; leave the house if you sense your partner will become violent.
- Avoid fights in rooms without access to a door or where weapons are kept.
- Find a safe place to go if you are in danger—family, friends, a shelter.
- Get a court protective order.
- Memorize emergency numbers.
- Have money available—cash kept with a friend, a separate savings account, a credit card.
- Teach your children not to get in the middle of a fight between you and your partner.
- Have a cell phone or calling card handy; do not use your home phone or cell phone to call for help if your partner can trace the numbers.
- Create a signal to use with friends and family to alert them to danger.
- Have access to important items such as extra car keys, a driver’s license, social security number, checkbook, address book or a list of important numbers, health insurance card, passport, immigration papers, copies of birth certificates for you and your children, school and medical records, and children’s favorite toys.
- Keep copies of important papers and items (including a change of clothes) with a trusted friend or relative.



Leaving an abusive partner takes courage, support, and planning. But it is possible. For your safety and the safety of

The Cycle of Violence

IPV can follow a three-stage cycle that repeats over and over. It is called the “Cycle of Violence.”



- 1. Tension-building stage:** Tension builds over time and may include “minor” incidents such as pushing or threats. To delay movement to stage two the victim may act passive, “stay out of the way,” and avoid making the partner upset.
- 2. Violent stage:** Tension explodes, resulting in severe abuse.
- 3. Honeymoon stage:** The abuser apologizes, promises to stop the abuse, and often is very loving for a while. The abuser may feel sorry about the abuse, promise to stop and get help, and show regret and extra kindness. The victim then feels loved and believes the violence will end. The cycle then repeats.

In time, the honeymoon stage may get shorter, and the tension-building and violent stages longer.

your children, talk about your options with an IPV counselor before you leave. If the IPV is mild or has just started, get professional help before it gets worse. If you choose to stay with your partner, the abuse may get worse over time—even if you get help. So have a safety plan ready. You cannot change your partner by loving him or her more, by changing yourself, or by hoping he or she will change if you wait it out. Your partner needs to get help, but even that may not stop the abuse. A relationship should not leave you feeling scared, depressed, hopeless, worthless, or in danger. You deserve to be safe and treated well. If the abuse continues, help is just a phone call away.

Sexual violence

Sexual violence is *all* completed or attempted sexual contact or behavior that happens without your clear, voluntary consent. No one has the right to make you be sexual, including your partner. Sexual violence can shatter a woman’s life in an instant. And it can take years to emotionally heal from the experience.

Sexual violence includes:

- Improper and unwanted touching, kissing, fondling, and groping.
- Sexual assault, such as rape or attempted rape (vaginal, oral, or anal). This includes sex when the victim is drunk, unconscious, or unable to give willing consent. It also includes unwanted sex with a partner, spouse, or date.
- Verbal, visual, or other noncontact sexual actions that force a person to join in unwanted sexual contact or attention. This includes flashing of sexual

Elder Abuse

Elder abuse is doing something, or failing to do something, that causes harm or risks harm to a vulnerable older adult. Nearly 90 percent of the abusers are family members, most often adult children or spouses. Elder abuse also happens in places such as nursing homes and hospitals. Among the elderly, women ages 80 and older are at highest risk for being abused or neglected.

Elder abuse includes:

- physical, sexual, or emotional abuse
- financial abuse such as taking or misusing an elderly person's money or property, or tricking her into spending or investing money
- ignoring or abandoning an elderly person under your care

If you think an elderly person you know is being abused, please tell someone. Call your local adult protective services, long-term care ombudsman, or the police.

If you are being abused, you can:

- Tell someone you trust, such as a doctor or friend.
- Call the U.S. Administration on Aging's Eldercare Locator toll-free number listed in the resource section on page 249 to find a local agency that can help.
- Contact your state or local adult protective services (APS).

body parts, being shown pornography, and verbal or written sexual harassment.

Sexual violence can happen anywhere—on a date, at a party, at work, at home, or in public. The attacker may be a stranger or someone you know, such as a partner, family member, or peer. In fact, in 8 of 10 rape cases, the victims know their rapist.

Survivors may feel shame or guilt. But you are never at fault—even if you didn't fight back or say no because of fear or shock. You are *never* to blame for someone else's violence.

If you are a survivor of sexual violence, professional help and support groups are available. Even if the abuse or assault is from childhood, it may still deeply af-



fect you. You are not alone, and you do not need to hide what happened. Silence only gives the abuser more power. Help

stop sexual violence by healing yourself, speaking out, and supporting other survivors.

Sexual Violence: Risk Factors	
Risk factors for experiencing sexual violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young age—more than half of all rapes occur before age 18 • Drug or alcohol abuse • Having experienced past sexual violence • Living in poverty • Having risky sex, such as unprotected sex, sex with many partners, and/or sex at a young age
Risk factors for becoming sexually violent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol and drug abuse • Fantasies about forced sex (rape) • Impulsive and antisocial behavior • Preference for impersonal sex • Hostility toward women • Extreme male stereotyped behaviors • Sexual and physical abuse as a child • Witnessed family violence as a child

Getting help after a sexual assault

Take steps right away if you've been assaulted:

- Get away from the attacker and find a safe place as fast as you can. Call 911 and report the crime.
- Call a friend or family member you trust. Or call a crisis center or a hotline, such as the National Sexual Assault Hotline toll-free number listed in the resource section on page 249.
- Do not wash, comb, or clean any part of your body. Do not change clothes if possible, so the hospital staff can collect evidence. Do not touch or change anything at the crime scene.
- Go to your nearest hospital emergency room right away. You need to be examined and treated for injuries.



- Ask if the hospital has a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) who can perform your exam and provide emotional support. She will collect evidence using a rape kit to find fibers, hairs, saliva, semen, or clothing the attacker may have left behind.
- You will be screened for sexually transmitted infections, offered counseling, or given other treatment.

- Most hospitals will offer emergency contraception pills to help prevent pregnancy. If it is not offered, you can request it.
- The hospital staff can call the police and contact a rape crisis center counselor.

Ways to protect yourself

To reduce your risk of sexual violence:

- Trust your feelings. If you feel in danger, you probably are and need to get away.
- Notice what and who is around you. Know where you are going and stay in well-lit areas. Park your car in well-lit areas.
- After getting in your car, drive away. Do not sit in your car to look at items you bought or make phone calls.
- If you are in danger, blow a whistle, or yell “FIRE” instead of “help” or “rape.”
- Never leave a social event with someone you just met or do not know well.
- Never walk or jog alone at night or in secluded areas.
- Meet new dates in public places. Be careful when meeting people from Internet dating sites. Tell a friend where you are going and who you are going out with.
- Never drink anything that has been out of your sight, or that you did not see being poured from a new bottle. Date rape drugs are odorless and tasteless.
- Avoid parties where a lot of alcohol may be served, such as fratern-

nity events. Control your drinking at events.

- Keep your car and home doors locked. Lock home windows. Install home security.
- Go out in groups and have friends watch out for each other.
- Offer help to other women who may be in danger.

Stalking

Stalking is a pattern of repeated, unwanted attention, harassment, or contact that directly or indirectly communicates a threat or scares a person.

Stalkers may:

- follow or wait for you in certain places
- appear at your home or work
- sit outside your home
- make harassing phone calls
- leave written messages or objects



Cyberstalking

Cyberstalking is use of the Internet, e-mail, or other forms of online communications to stalk another person. It can include:

- harassment or threats in chat rooms
- e-mail, instant messages (IM), or text message threats and harassment
- improper messages on a message board or in a guest book
- tracing your computer and Internet use
- obscene or improper e-mail messages or photo attachments
- sending electronic viruses
- someone pretending to be you in a chat room

If you are cyberstalked:

- Log off right away and stay off-line for at least 24 hours.
- Send the person a clear, written warning to stop harassing you and to never contact you again.
- If the harassment continues, do not respond to anything the person writes. It gives them a sense of power and can increase the stalking.

- damage or steal your things
- harass you through the Internet, e-mail, or chat rooms
- use a hidden camera to watch you
- use computer software and hardware tools to track and harass you
- send gifts or love letters
- call all the time

Stalking is illegal, yet 1 in 12 women will be stalked in their lifetimes. It is a crime that can be hard to prove, harder to stop, and difficult to get others to take seriously. Yet 76 percent of women killed by their intimate partners were first stalked by them.

Most victims are stalked for about 1.8 years. These women often feel helpless, anxious, and depressed. They often have nightmares; feel out of control; have

trouble sleeping, eating, and concentrating; and live with constant fear. Stalking can also cause financial problems if fear or depression keeps a woman from going to work.

Steps to take if you are being stalked:

- Trust your instincts. If you are, or think you may be, in danger, find a safe place to go, such as a police station, fire station, or public area.
- Plan in advance what you will do if you are in danger.
- If you cannot get out of danger, but can get to a phone, call 911.
- Get a restraining order. If the order does not stop the stalker, call a violence hotline for advice (toll-free numbers are listed in the resource section on page 249.)

- Change your online identity and all of the information in your IM or chat profile.
- Change your e-mail address and Internet service provider (ISP).
- For e-mail stalking, contact the person's ISP and file a complaint.
- Keep all e-mails or log files from the stalker for evidence.
- If you think you are in physical danger, contact the police or Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).



Be safe online:

- Never post online profiles or messages with details that could be used to identify or locate you (such as age, sex, address, workplace, phone number, school, teams you play on, or places you hang out).
- Do not post photos on a site that can be accessed by the public, such as in a MySpace profile, online dating profile, chat group, or blog.
- Do not tell anyone your online ID or passwords.

- Take threats seriously. File a complaint with the police. If they cannot help, call a violence hotline for advice. Until the stalkers do something they can be arrested for, police can only talk to them.
- Collect evidence for police. Record every incident. Include the time, date, and other important information.
- Keep videotapes, audiotapes, answering machine/voicemail messages, e-mail messages, photos of the person outside your home or workplace, property damage, and any letters or e-mail.
- Cut off all contact with the stalker.
- Carry a cell phone at all times.
- Secure your home with alarms and motion-sensitive lights.
- Keep your garage and car locked. Check around you before getting in

the car. Get a locking gas cap. Know safe locations you can drive to if being followed, and stay in the car and blow your horn to get attention when you stop.

- Get help. Tell police, your employer, and family, friends, and neighbors about the stalking.

Violence against women is a serious threat to health and well-being. Yet you can take important steps to reduce your risk of violence. If you have experienced violence, there are people who can help you heal emotionally and safely move on with your life. The first step is to ask for help. If you or someone you know is experiencing violence, contact the resources listed in "For more information" or talk with someone you trust. No one deserves to be hurt. ■

One Woman's Story

When I started a new job in a different state, it was hard for me to meet new people and make friends. I became very lonely, so I turned to the Internet for help. I discovered that through online dating sites, I could easily find men willing to meet me and buy me drinks. I enjoyed the company and attention; each time I met a new person was exciting, and it made me feel attractive, sexy. I became addicted to that feeling. While at first I was cautious about meeting them in person, I later became less concerned about my own personal safety. I ignored the horror stories I heard about women disappearing or being murdered by someone they met on the Internet. All I wanted was that next time when I would get dressed up, go out with someone new, and feel on top of the world. I was blessedly lucky—at first.

I met Joe online (his name has been changed), and even though he lived 2 hours away, we arranged to meet at a halfway point. I missed all the warning signs from the start. He had me meet him at a gas station where we left his car and took mine. We went to a club, and I drank too much to drive home safely. He said he would pay for a hotel and promised he would not try anything sexual. I trusted him. He did not keep his promise, no matter how many times I said STOP. I should have screamed at the top of my lungs. I should have kicked him. I should have left and never looked back. But all I kept thinking was, “This only happens to people I hear about in the news, not me. Maybe this is my fault. Did I bring this upon myself?” I should have kicked and screamed and MADE him stop. But I didn’t want to make a scene. I didn’t want to drive home drunk. I didn’t want to strand him there with his car halfway across town. I lay there and cried. He asked what was wrong and I told him, “You RAPED me.” He denied it and made me feel like an idiot. I never reported him.

The next morning I cursed myself all the way home for being so stupid. It took a lot of time and therapy to realize that, although it was stupid to put myself in such a dangerous situation, what happened to me was not my fault. Even now it’s hard to believe that. The point of this story is not to scare anyone out of online dating. Years later I signed up for online dating again—my sense of personal safety and self-esteem intact—and I met the man of my dreams. The important thing to remember is this: don’t let anything come before your personal safety. And don’t be afraid to scream like crazy and cause a scene. You are worth it.

Lisa

San Diego, California

**Don't let anything
come before your
personal safety.**

For More Information...

Office on Women's Health, HHS

200 Independence Ave SW, Room 712E
Washington, DC 20201

Web site: www.womenshealth.gov/violence

Phone number: (800) 994-9662,
(888) 220-5446 TDD

Administration on Aging, HHS

1 Massachusetts Ave
Washington, DC 20201

Web site: www.eldercare.gov

Eldercare Locator: (800) 677-1116

National Center on Elder Abuse, AOA

c/o Center for Community Research and
Services

University of Delaware

297 Graham Hall

Newark, DE 19716

Web site: www.ncea.aoa.gov

Phone number: (302) 831-3525 for
information on elder abuse,
(800) 677-1116 to find help in your state

Office for Victims of Crime Resource Center, DOJ

PO Box 6000

Rockville, MD 20849-6000

Web site: www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/ovcres

Phone number: (800) 851-3420

National Center for Victims of Crime and the Stalking Resource Center

2000 M St NW, Suite 480

Washington, DC 20036

Web site: www.ncvc.org

Phone number: (800) 394-2255,
(800) 211-7996 TTY/TDD

National Domestic Violence Hotline

PO Box 161810

Austin, TX 78716

Web site: www.ndvh.org

Phone number: (800) 799-7233,
(800) 787-3224 TTY

National Teen Dating Abuse Hotline

Web site: www.loveisrespect.org

Phone number: (866) 331-9474,
(866) 331-8453 TTY

Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network and the National Sexual Assault Hotline

2000 L St NW, Suite 406

Washington, DC 20036

Web site: www.rainn.org

Phone number: (800) 656-4673

